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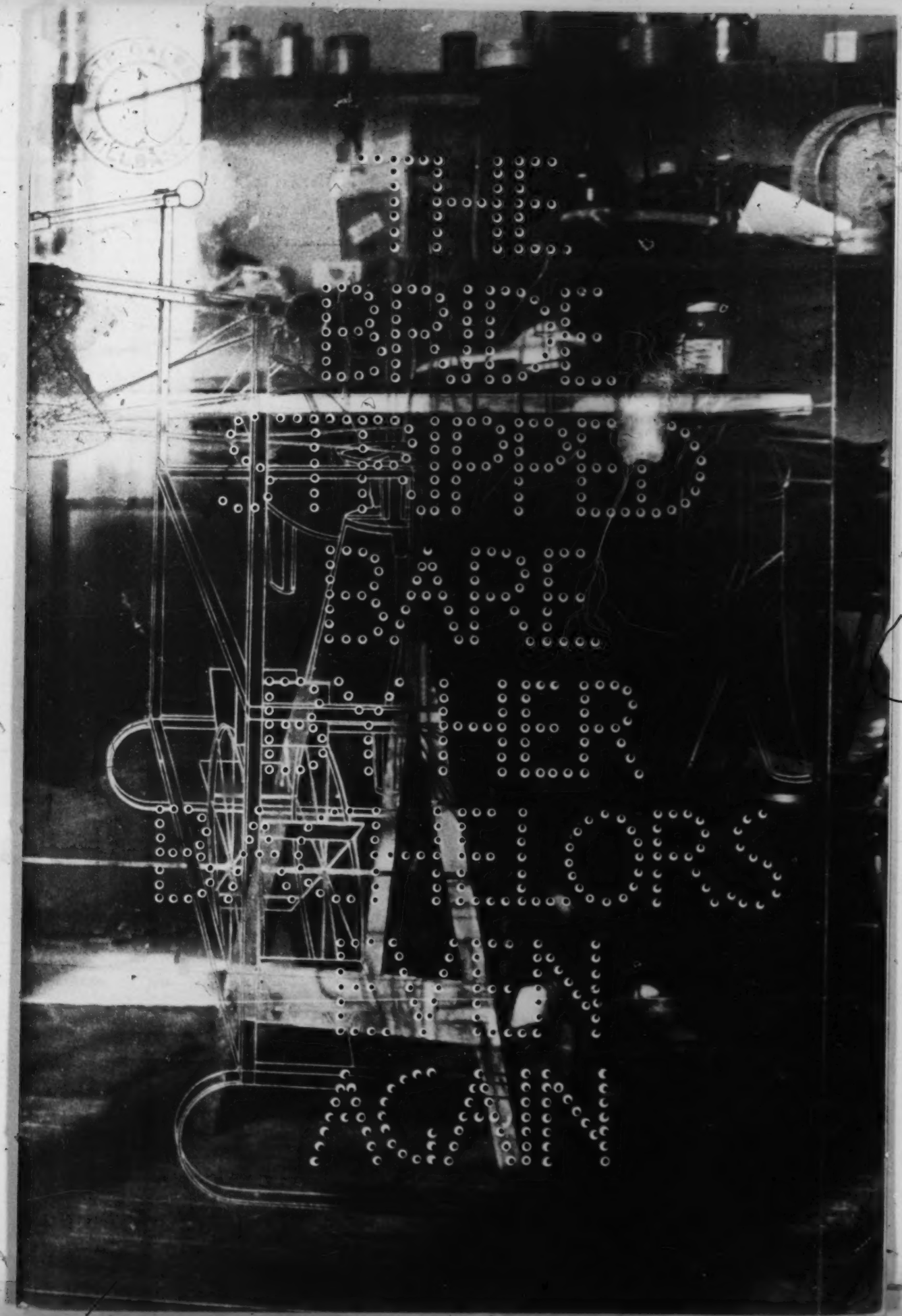
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THE BRIDE STRIPPED BARE BY HER BACHELORS EVEN AGAIN

A reconstruction by Richard Hamilton of MARCEL DUCHAMP'S LARGE GLASS

In the Autumn of 1912 Marcel Duchamp, at the age of 25 and after the production of a body of painting that would in itself earn him a place of high honour in twentieth century art, began to conjecture a new work which would press beyond the bounds of art as then known, one that would be a compound of literary and graphic forms. By the end of 1914 a mass of notes had been made which describe in mechanical terms, often poetically irrational, a project entitled *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. The pictorial embodiment of these ideas had been conceived as a composition on glass to be executed in lead wire, oil paint and lead foil. Many perspective studies had been made and parts had been tried out in the form of independent paintings.

In 1915 Duchamp went to America. It was there, soon after his arrival, that the large painting on glass was started. By 1918 a good deal had been done. Some new ideas were incorporated subsequent to that date until by 1923 the painting was complete, or rather, Duchamp decided that he would leave it at that. In 1926 it was displayed in Brooklyn; a first public appearance. While being returned from exhibition it was accidentally smashed. Ten years later Duchamp put the shattered pieces together. It was installed permanently in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1954 a gift from Katherine Dreier who wished to see it reunited with the great collection of Walter Arensberg who had been close to the work since Duchamp first arrived in America.

The *Large Glass* is in two halves on separate sheets of plate glass, one above the other, making an overall size of 108 x 67 inches. The lower glass, slightly larger than the upper, contains the *Bachelor Apparatus* which breaks down into five major units: *Chocolate Grinder, Glider, Malic Moulds, Sieves* and *Oculist Witnesses*. The *Bride Machine* above consists of three main parts: *Bride, Blossoming* and *Shots*. This nomenclature is elaborated in the textual component of the work — a documentation published in 1934 as a collection of 94 items, facsimile notes, drawings and photographs; the publication known as the *Green Box*. Each of the elements subdivides into smaller units having their own precisely described character and functioning — a network of complexly interrelating activity that only the notes can fully communicate. The *Large Glass* is thus a construct surrounded by a cluster of associated productions each having its own validity and each contributing hugely to our understanding of one of the most mysterious works of art of all time.

When the Arts Council of Great Britain proposed to organise a major Duchamp retrospective at the Tate Gallery for June 1966 it seemed so desperately unfortunate that our British audience should be denied any experience of the Glass that we decided to fill the gap with at least some semblance of the great painting. A precedent had been established for in 1961 Ulf Linde made a version for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Prompted by a full size photographic copy on film for a BBC programme on Duchamp, I had, that same year, thought about the possibility of making a replica. In June 65, with the enthusiastic support of William Copley, an American painter and friend of Duchamp, a start was made on a new version of the Glass in the Fine Art Department of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

It isn't possible to approach this task in the way that copies are usually made of paintings — to set up a canvas beside the original and reproduce the marks stroke for stroke. To work from photographs isn't satisfactory because much information, even at the straightforward level of fabrication, is lost. The alternative method, that of using the detailed documentation of the *Green Box* to cover the ground again — to reconstruct procedures rather than imitate the effects of action — was the one adopted. Duchamp's attitude to painting after 1912 moves progressively to a point where the act of creation can be no more than the nomination of a mass-produced object to the status of art. This seemingly perverse proposition is the logical extension of a point of view which caused Duchamp to divorce the sensual and manipulative aspects of painting from his purely conceptual interests of that time. The techniques of the Glass — the craftsmanship and even the planning method — are devised to isolate the artist from any emotional relationship with his medium. Drawing is mainly draughtsmanship of a geometric kind. Paint is applied in flat areas contained by boundary lines of lead wire. There are no passages where the Duchamp hand cannot be followed quite faithfully without the least consciousness of forgery. The most crucial decision in the reconstruction was that of opting to avoid a copy of the present appearance of the Glass. Severe deterioration has taken place quite apart from the fragmentation of the glass itself. In its fifty or so years of life it has succumbed to drastic changes. Our efforts have been directed at a recapitulation of intention — to make the glass as it was conceived, allowing for the possibility of change but accepting the inevitability of a different life for this echo of a masterpiece. The most obvious feature of the Philadelphia Glass, caused by the accident which ran sparkling fractures in a thousand rivulets across it, we have not attempted to repeat. Duchamp did use chance in three closely controlled sequences in his planning of the *Large Glass*. The breaking was an unpredicted calamity which caused, however, little distress in its victim. This new version is made on armour plate glass — a provision likely to preserve the appearance of its model's youth.

The parts of the *Bachelor Apparatus* are precisely located as though they existed in the space behind the glass. Within the *Green Box* is a pair of drawings, a *plan* and an *elevation* of the objects situated in the lower glass. Duchamp used these to produce a *perspective*, first in one tenth scale, then half size on canvas, then full size on the plaster wall, now destroyed, of his studio in Paris. My first task was to make the lost full size perspective drawing from the dimensioned plan and elevation. References were made to the Philadelphia Glass more to gain knowledge of the construction of subject matter than to copy delineations on the surface of the original. There are slight differences — deviations accepted to maintain an integrity in the reconstruction equalling that of the original. Tracings were made, from the new perspective, of each of the elements with key lines added to relate them to each other. These tracings, reversed, were attached to the front of the glass to give the positioning of lead wire, formed to the drawing, then cemented to the back of the glass with mastic varnish.

Two studies were made on glass by Duchamp. So unusual are the techniques that it seemed sensible to repeat these — not only did we gain experience in handling the medium but we acquired more exhibits whose originals were too fragile to be loaned to the Arts Council. Duchamp's first trial was of the *Glider* on a semi-circular piece of glass (his only glass painting to remain unbroken) now in the Philadelphia Museum entitled *Water Mill within Glider (in Neighboring Metals)*, dated 1913-15. The second study, *Nine Malic Moulds*, dated 1914-15, is still in the possession of the artist. Duchamp permitted these studies to be repeated for our reconstruction. Further studies to explore method (practise runs not found necessary by Duchamp) were made in Newcastle: a small glass of the *Sieves*, trying out a specified *dust raising* process, and another of the *Oculist Witnesses*. The *Oculist Witnesses*, unlike the rest of the Glass, demanded a technique not used by Duchamp. The right hand area of the lower glass had been silvered on the back and a drawing transferred to the silver by Duchamp through a piece of carbon paper. The silvering was then scraped away up to the drawn lines leaving the brilliantly reflective image. The long process was shortened in the remake by means of a silk-screen made from a blocked in redrawing of the carbon paper. Pigment screened on to the mirror formed a resist which allowed the redundant silver to be etched away.

The upper half of the Glass is less precise in its drawing; *Bride* and *Blossoming* are free organic constructions. The outlines were taken from photographs: a technique which has itself perfect antecedents, for the *Bride* in the Philadelphia Glass derives directly from Duchamp's 1912 canvas called *Bride*. Parts of a photographic enlargement of the *Bride* painting provided a new configuration for the Glass. The *Shots*, nine holes drilled at spots located by projecting a paint dipped match from a toy cannon, were plotted from the Philadelphia Glass.

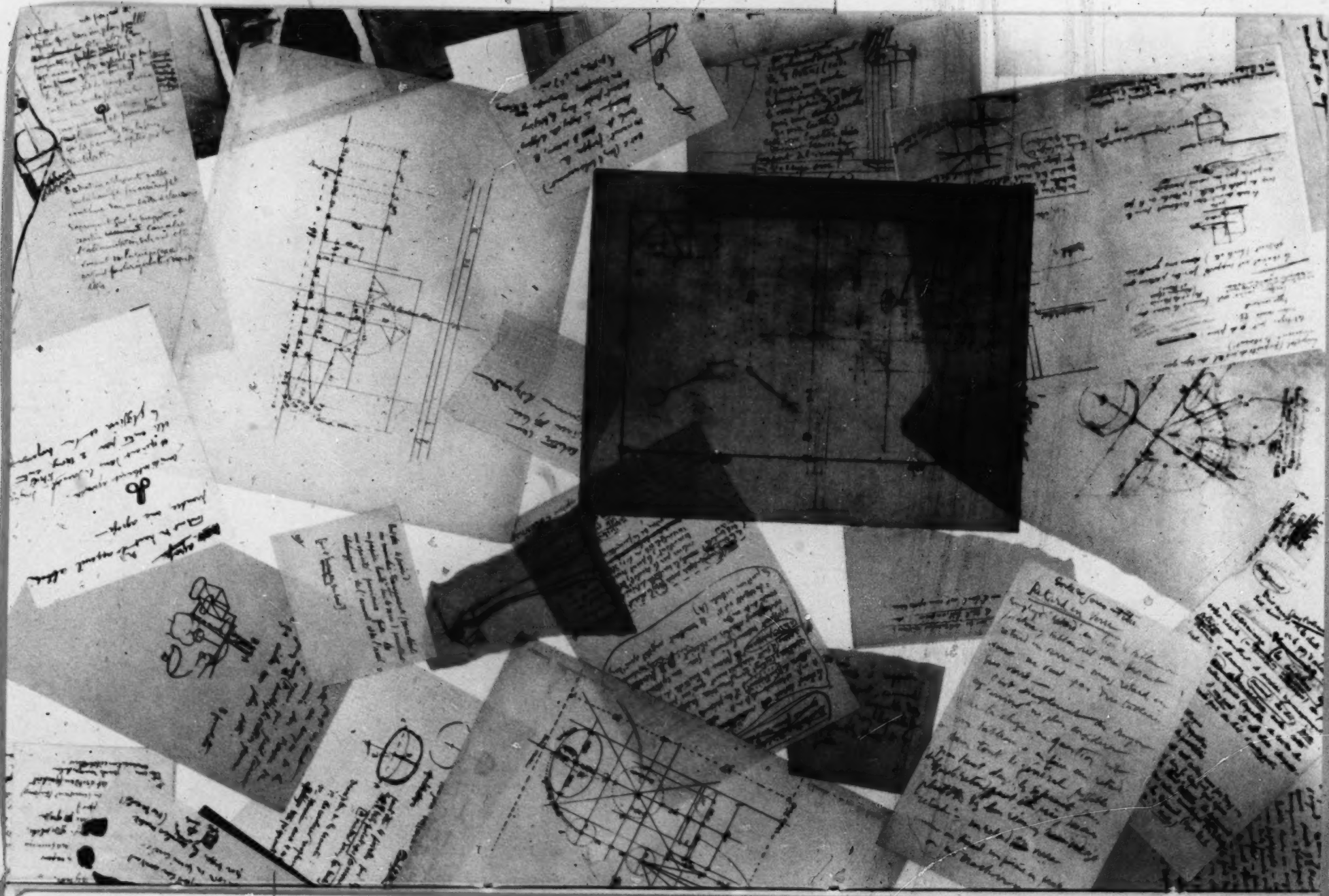
Duchamp's labour extending over thirteen years has been repeated in about as many months in Newcastle. His problems were not ours — mental effort was exerted only in the direction of detective work, deductions from signs marking a path to be followed — the creative anguish was erased from the trail. We were speeded by adequate funds for the venture and our University ambience made assistance available as needed. Duchamp's lonely nourishing of ideas into form was a far cry from the appreciative co-operation provided fifty years later and which is gratefully acknowledged here.

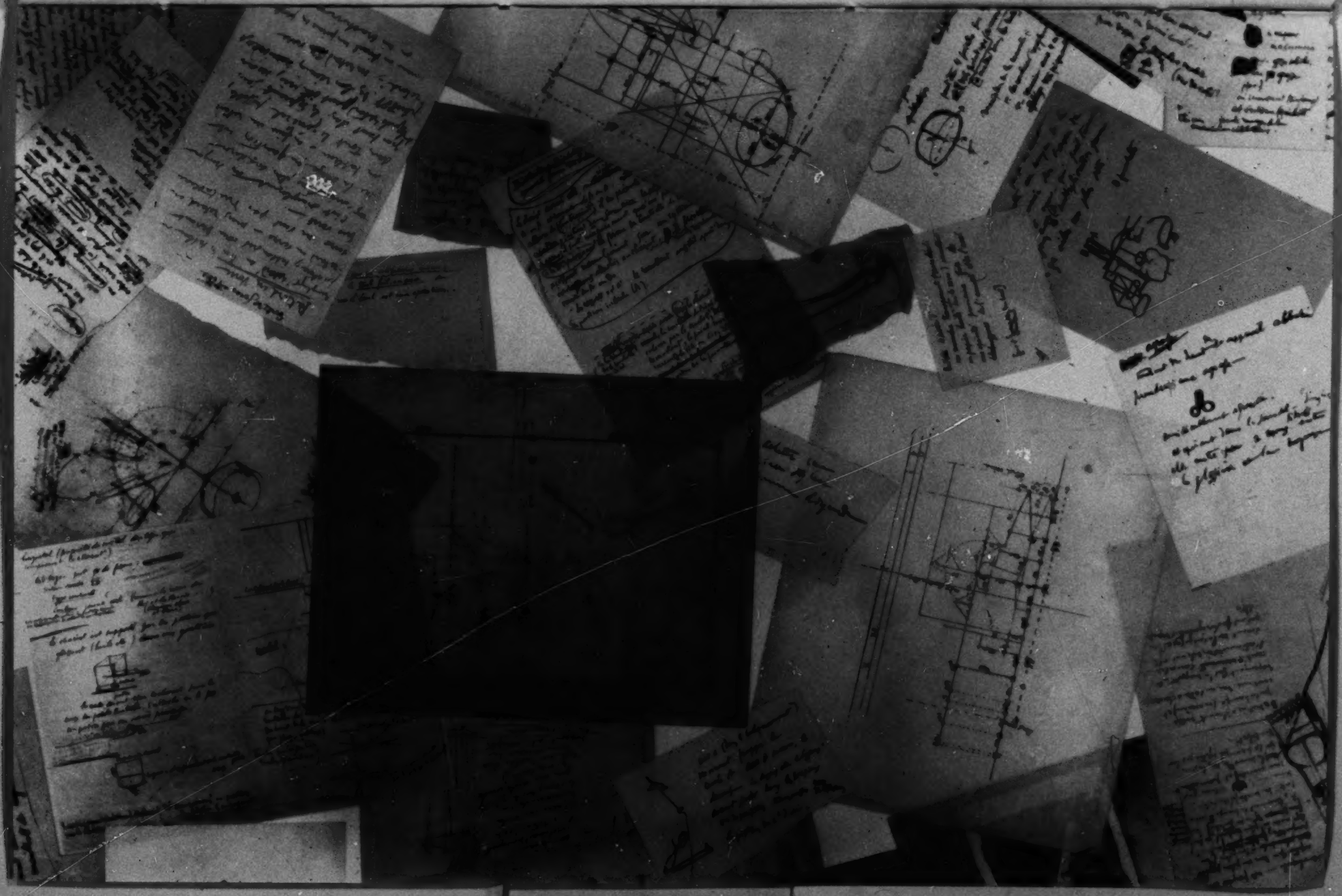
Professor Kenneth Rowntree realized the value of the project as research appropriate to a University department and his support at all stages was vital. The Metallurgy Department of the University extruded lead wire when we were unaware that the material was readily available in France as a fuse material. Mr. John Knipe of the Geography Department's cartography section made the extremely difficult technical drawing of the *Oculist Witnesses*. The Department of Mechanical Engineering gave great help in the construction of frames, in particular the contribution of Mr. Frank Robinson cannot be overestimated. Local industry was also involved. Reyrolle and Company undertook the manufacture of a semi-circular frame for the *Glider* glass which could only be accomplished with large machine tools. The Charles Trevelyan Technical College also helped with this.

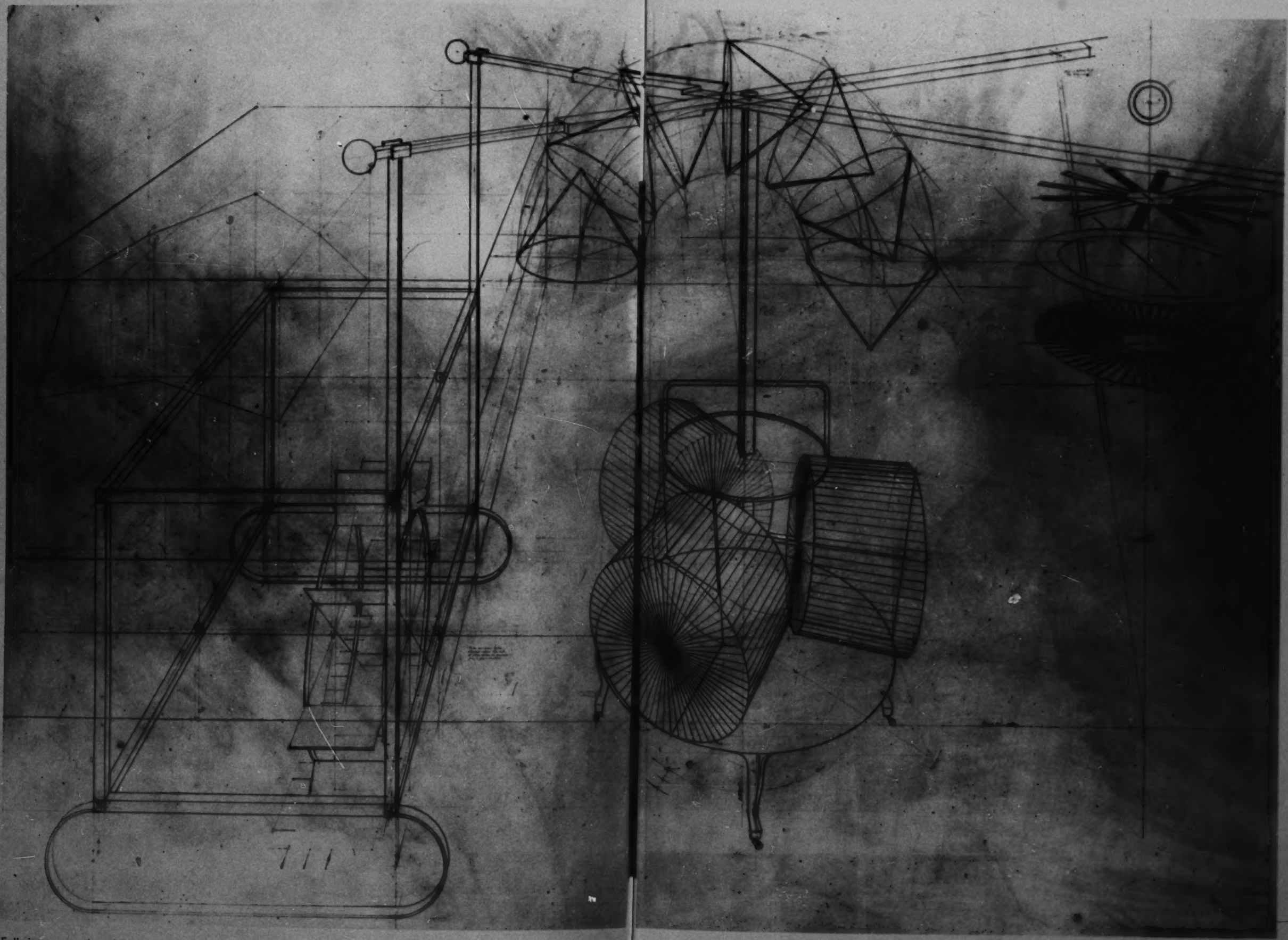
Photographs of stages in the production of the Newcastle glass were taken by myself and by Mark Lancaster who also co-operated in the design and production of this illustrated record.

Richard Hamilton
April, 1966

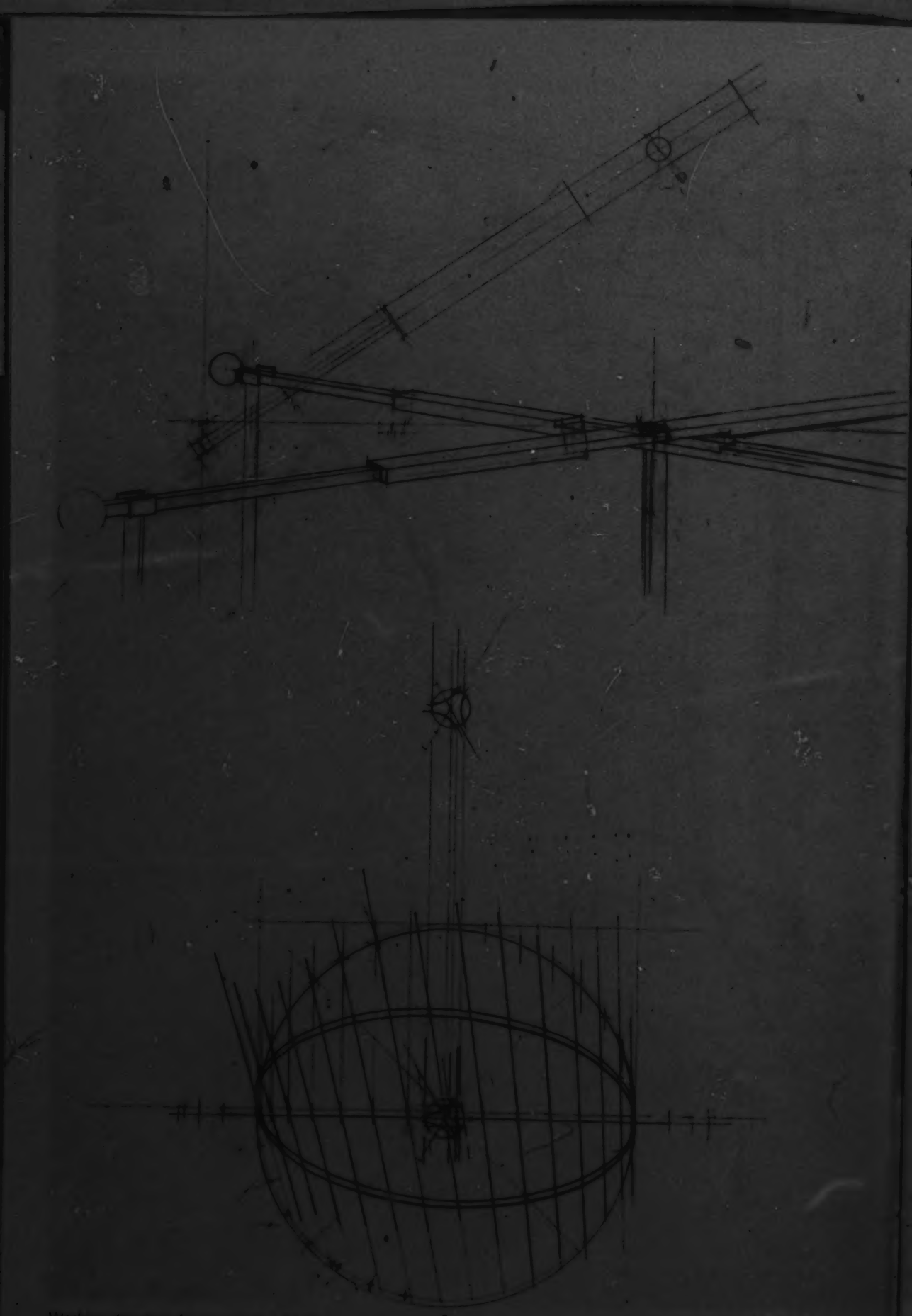
The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Marcel Duchamp 1915-1923
Photographed in the home of Katherine Dreier at Milford, Connecticut



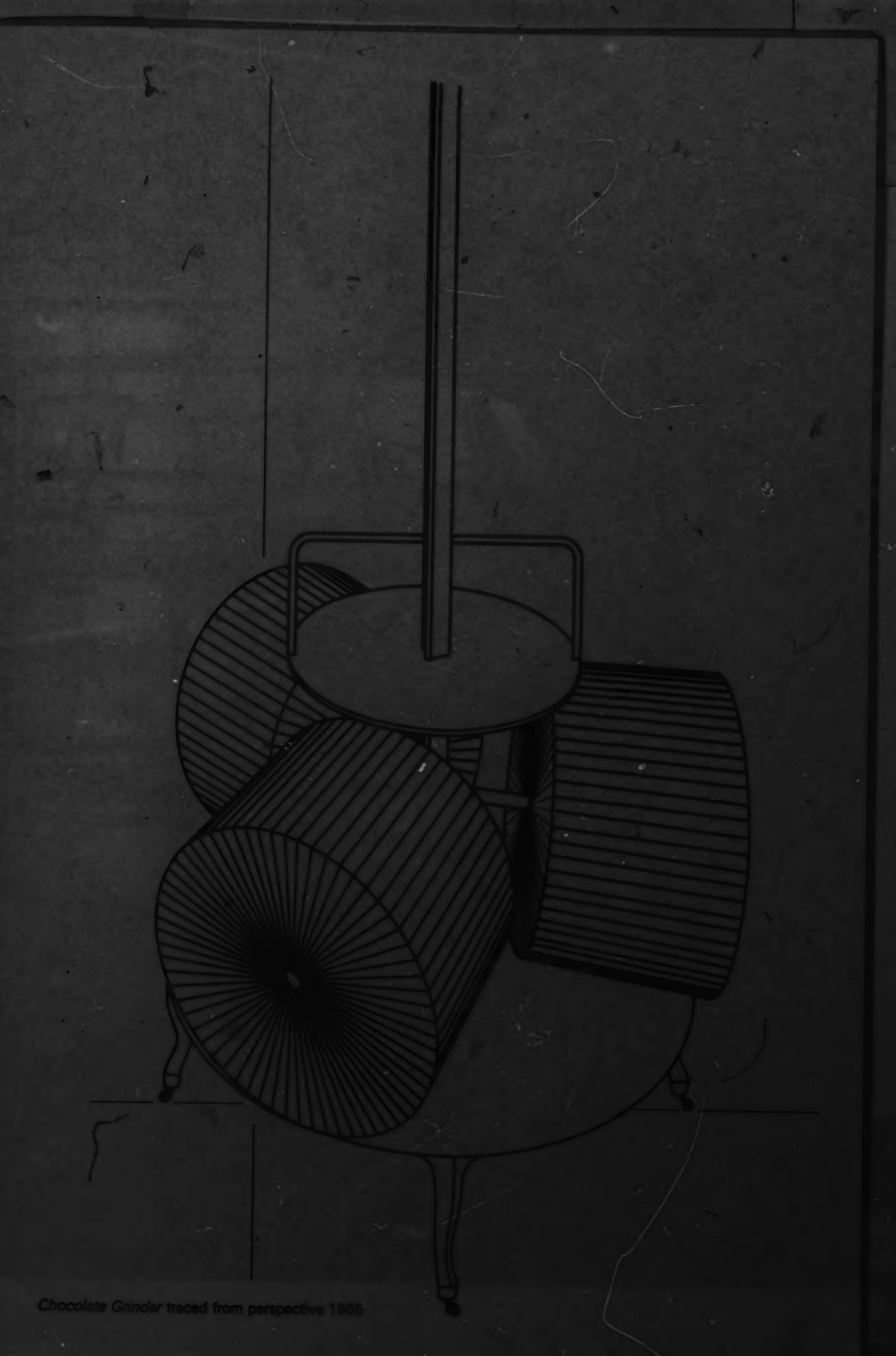




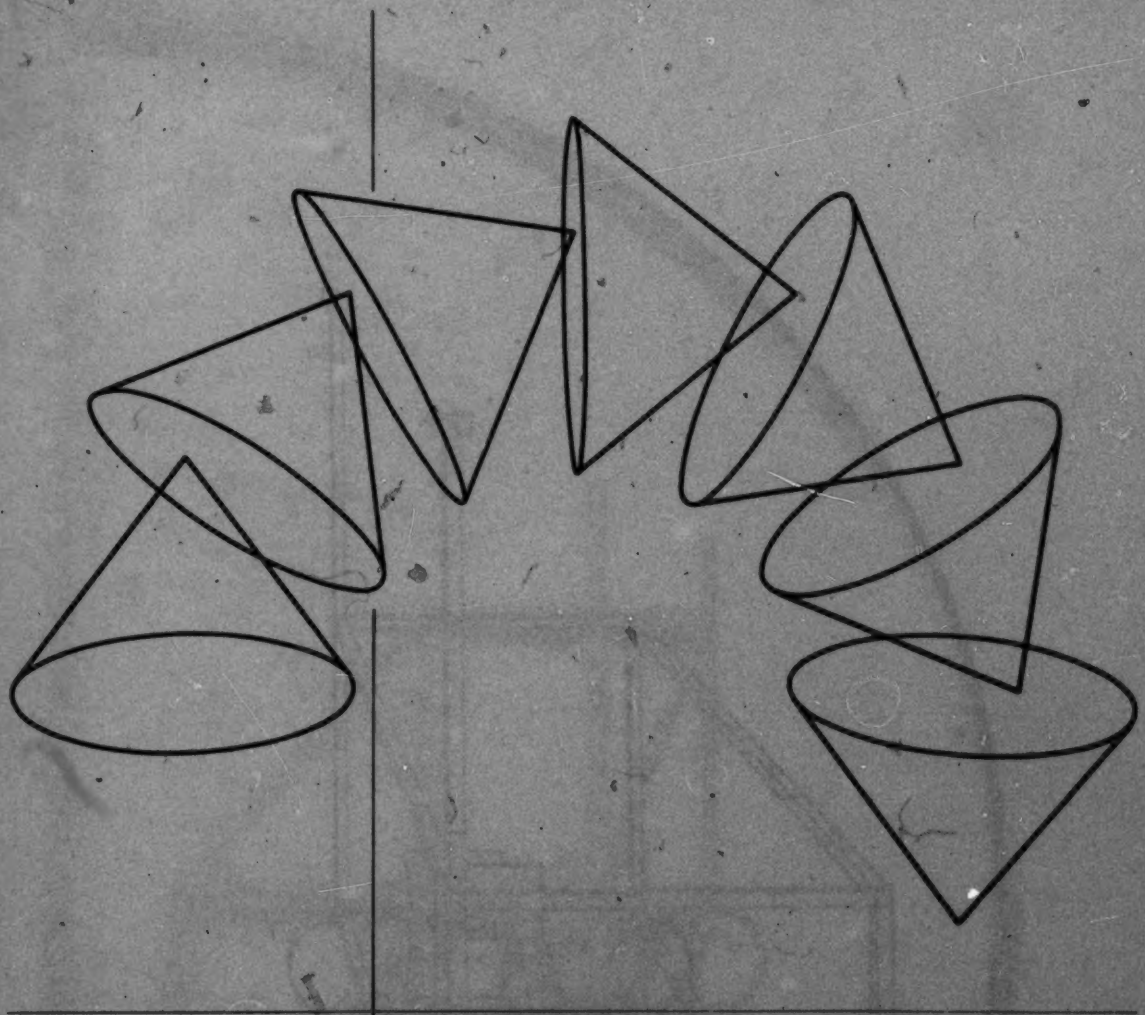
Full size perspective of *Bachelor Apparatus* 1965



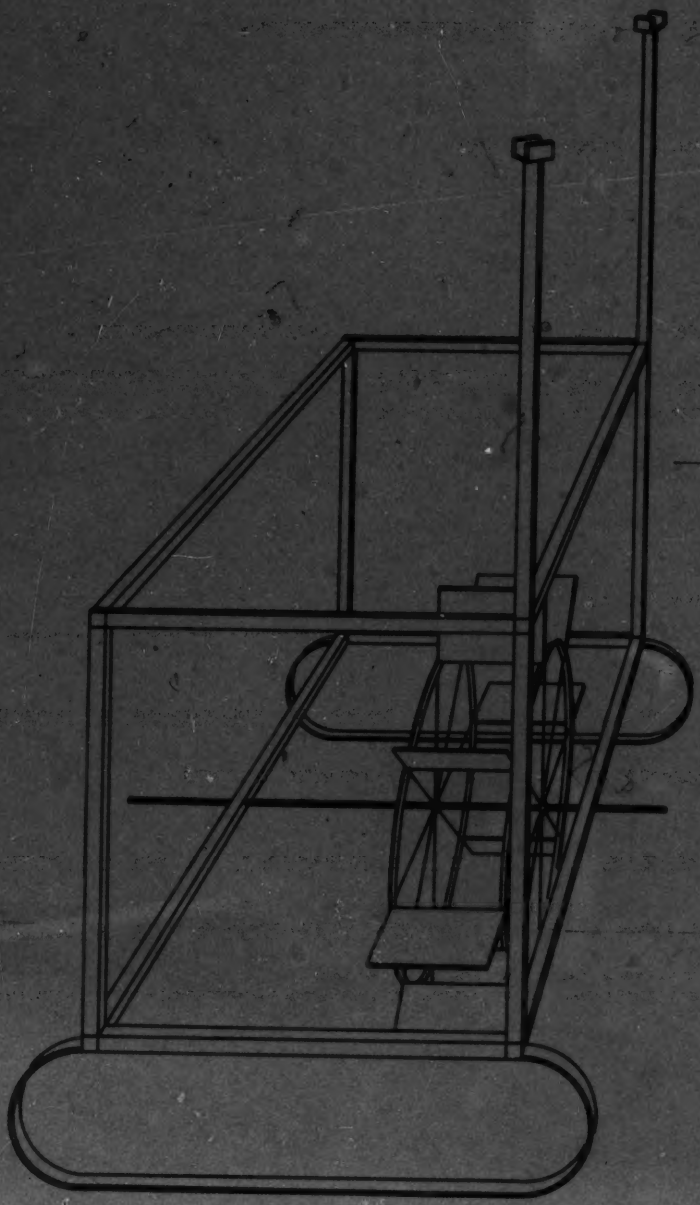
Working drawings for perspective 1965



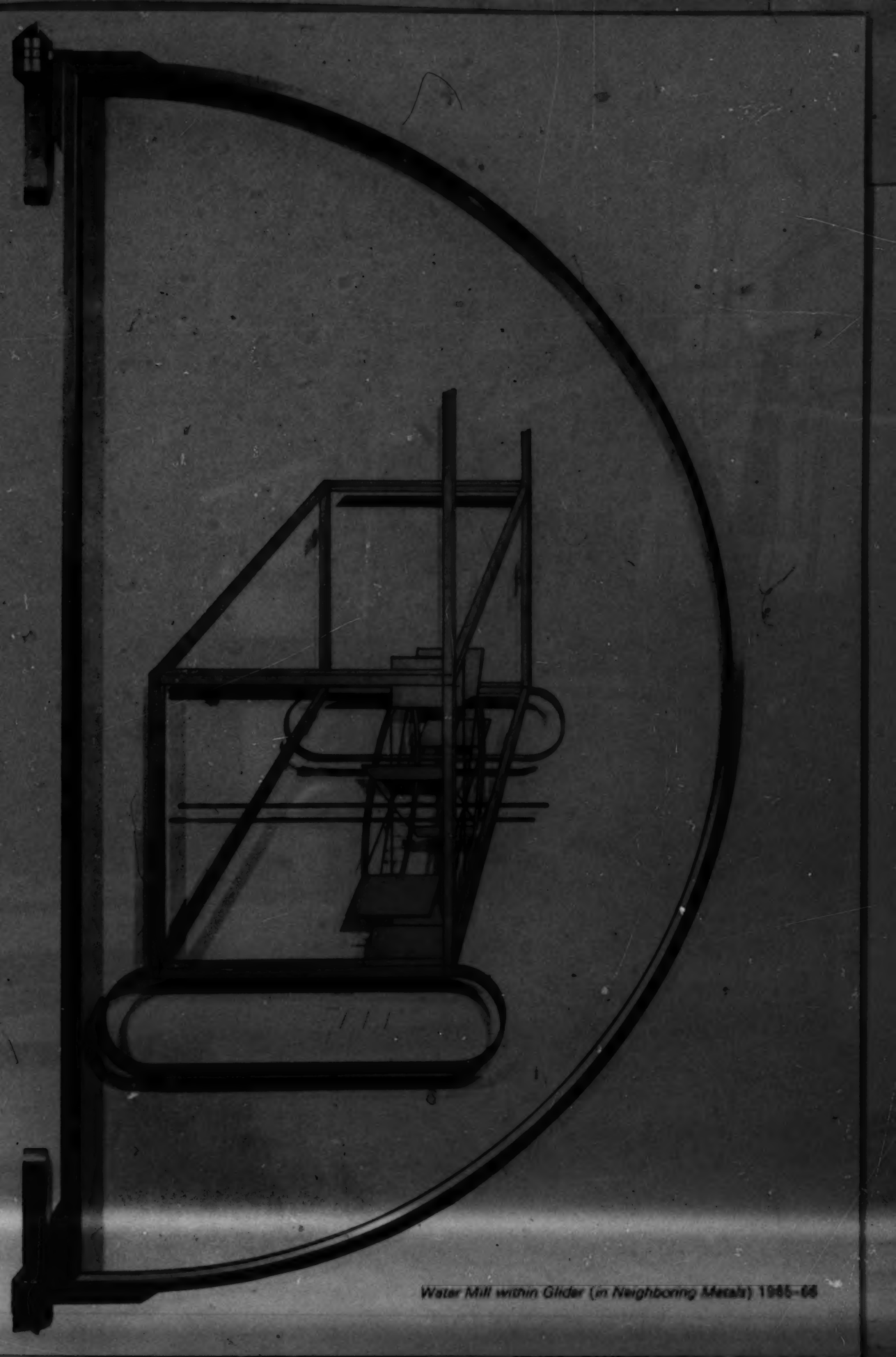
Chocolate Grinder traced from perspective 1988



Sieves traced from perspective 1965

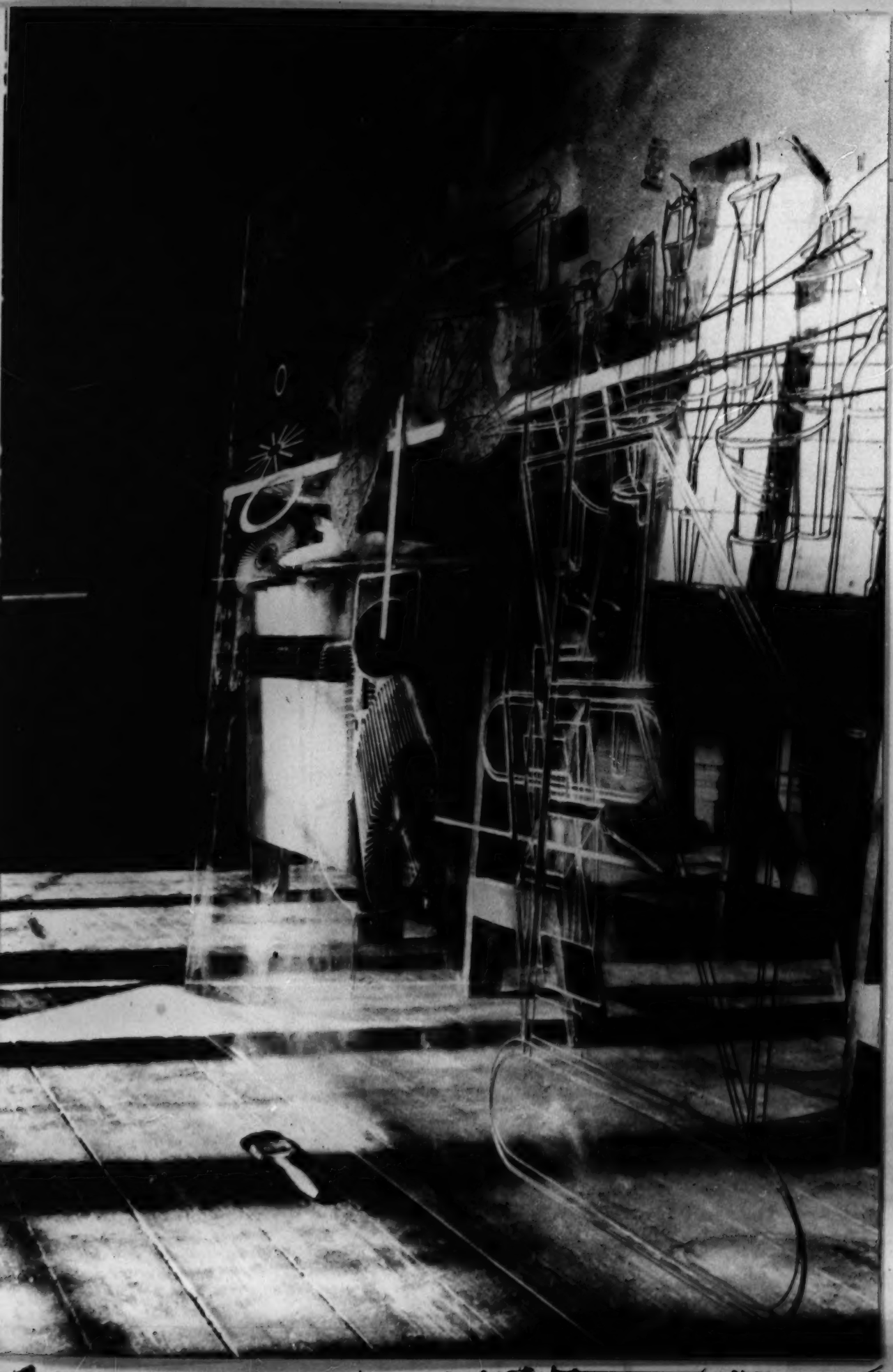


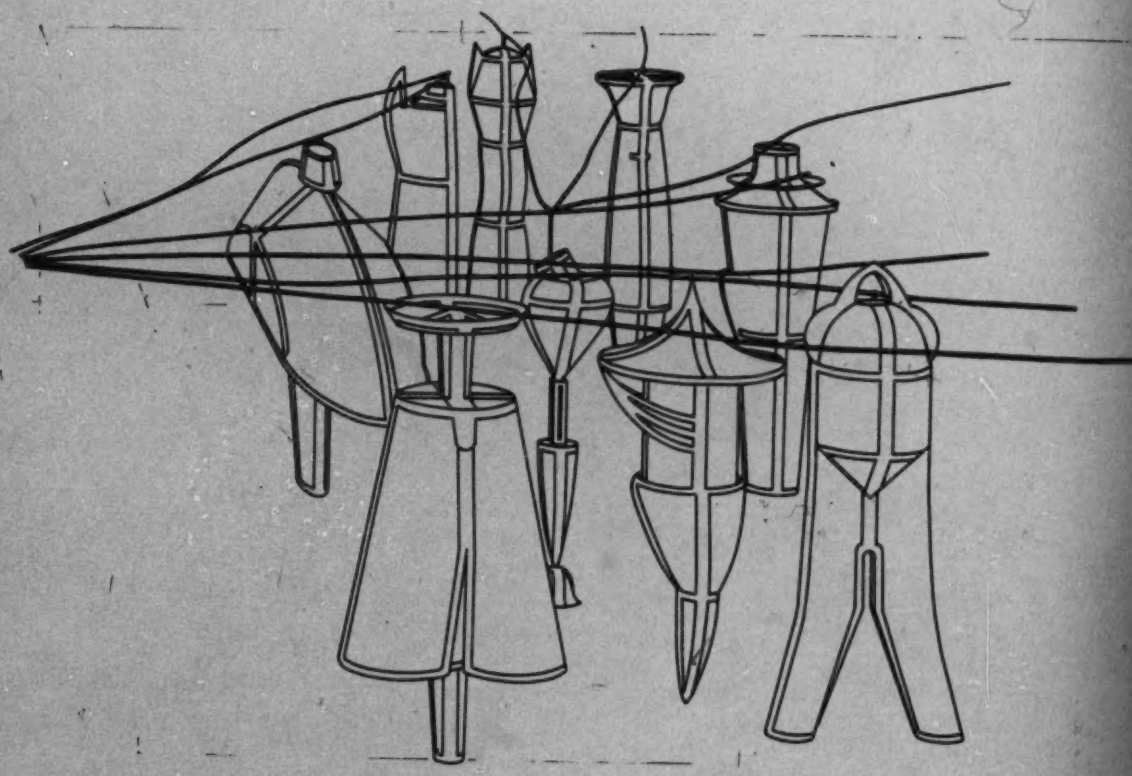
Glider traced from perspective 1965



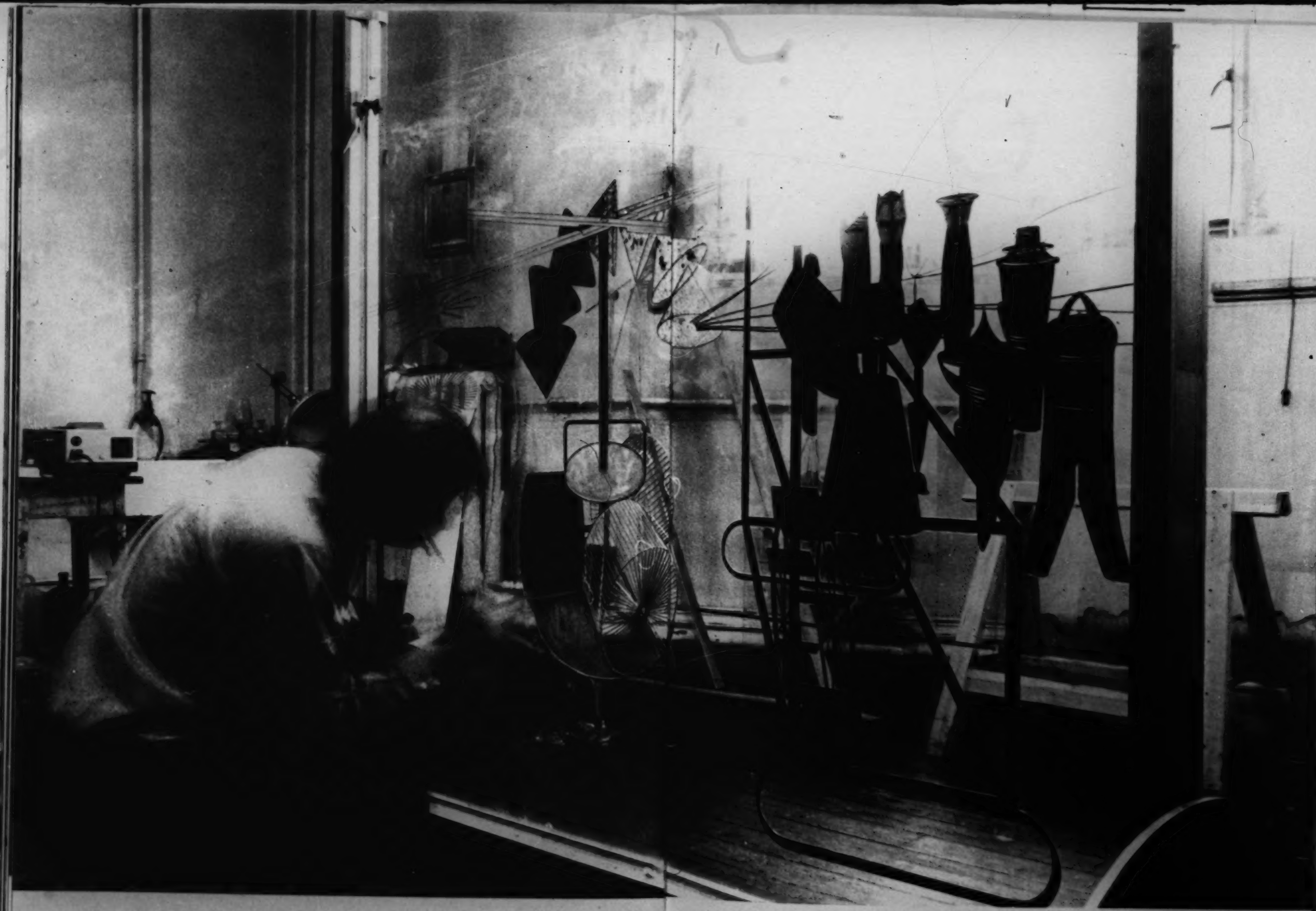
Water Mill within Glider (in Neighboring Metals) 1985–86

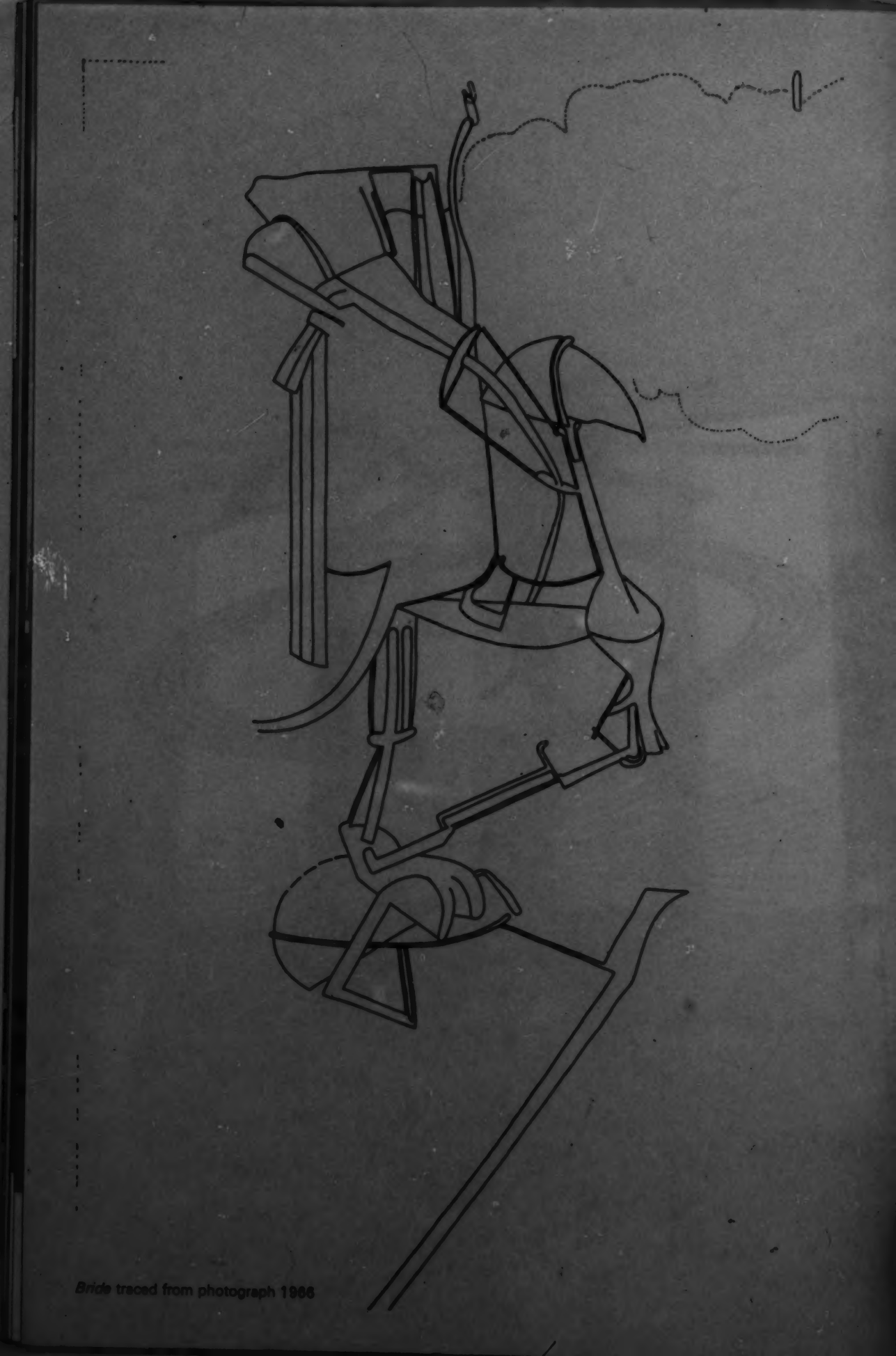
Verso



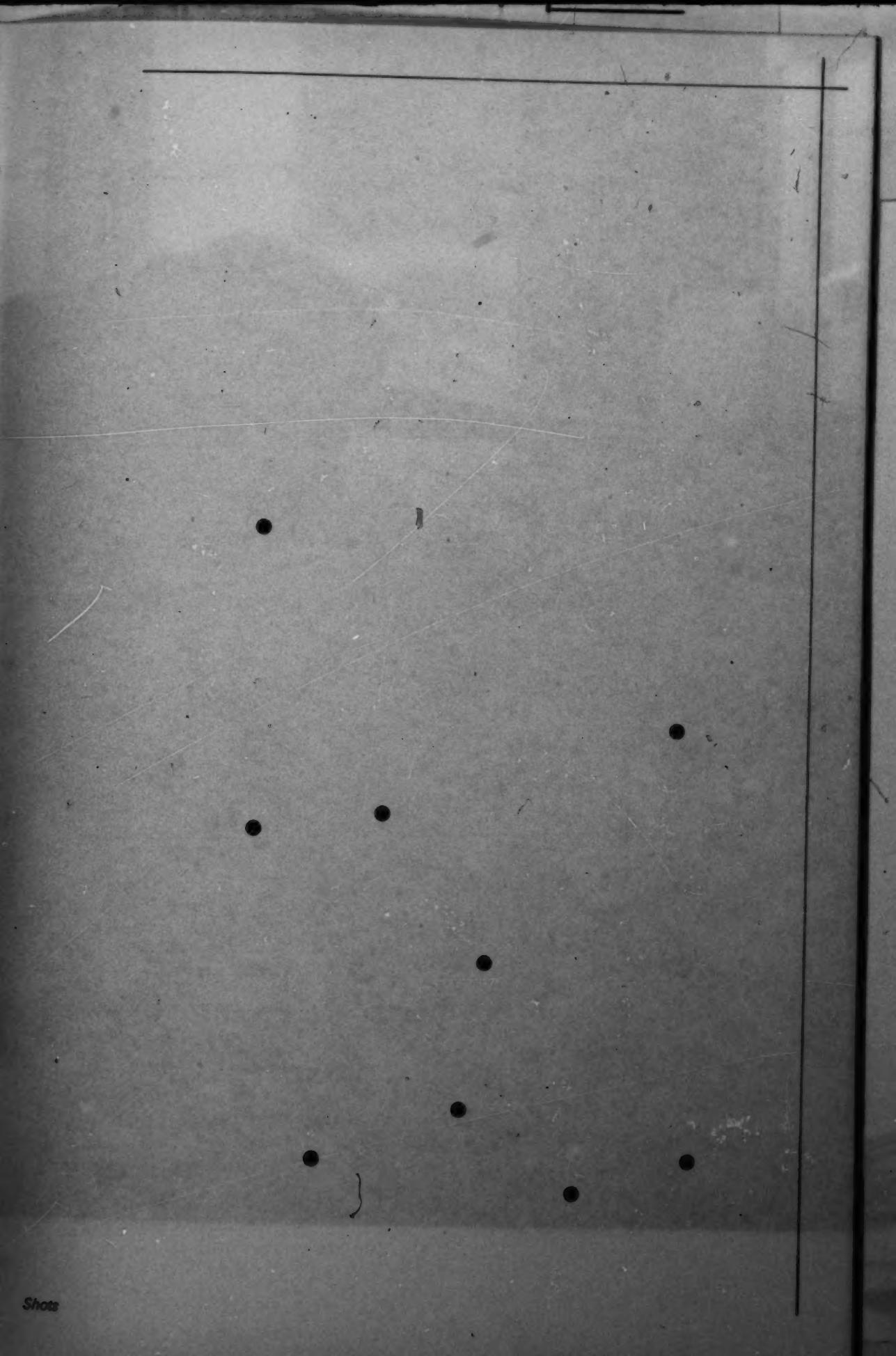


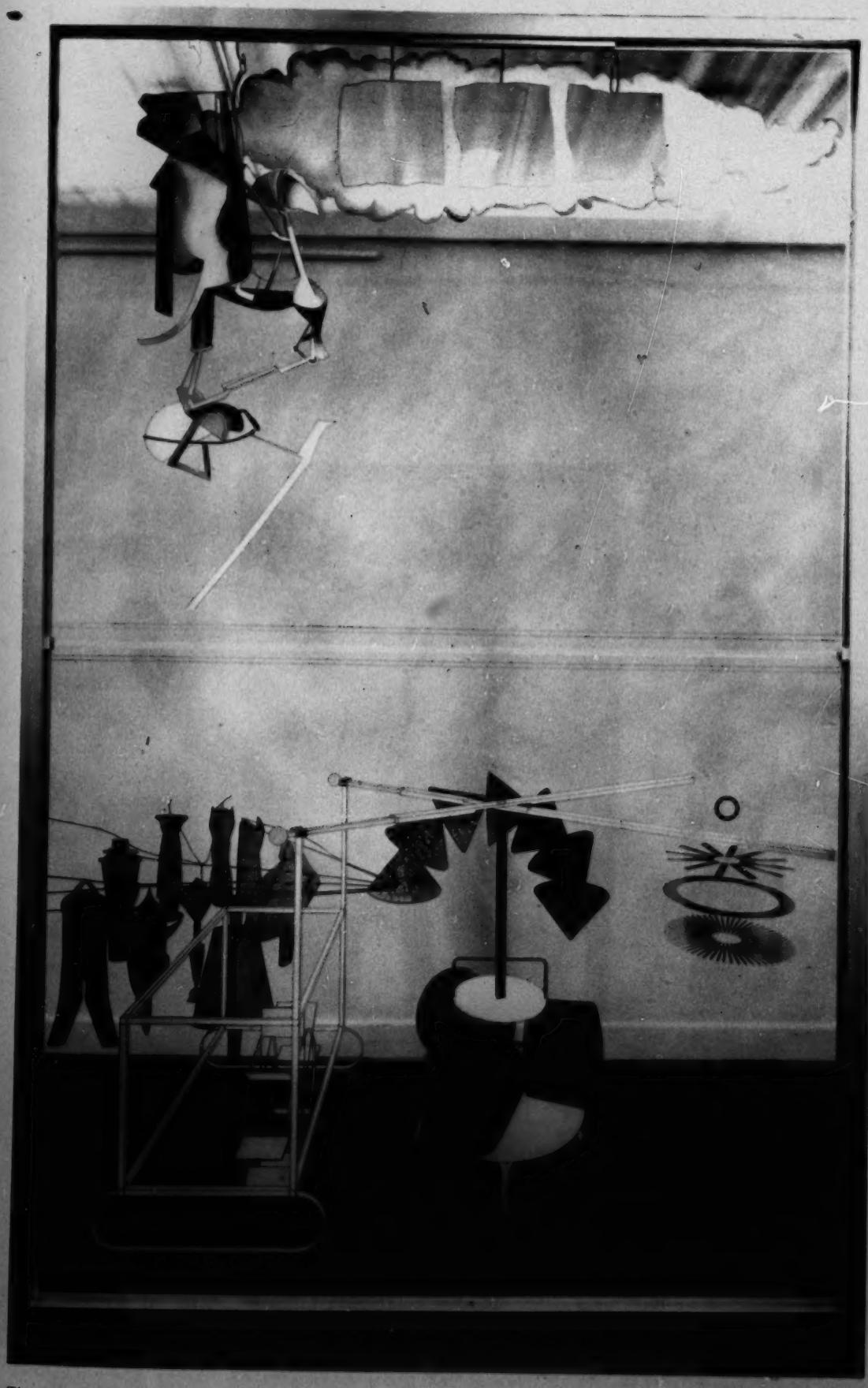
Nine Malic Moulds 1966





Bride traced from photograph 1966


Shots



The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even 1965-66

Marcel Duchamp

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